Chapter 6
Musical Analyses of Mordechai Gebirtig’s Chosen Pieces

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ABSTRACT

Restoring the memory of the irretrievably lost word of a Jewish community is important for many reasons. To start with, familiarization with the unknown helps with better understanding of the everyday life of Polish Jews, often perceived as a hermetic society, rousing anxiety particularly among those who are totally unfamiliar with Jewish culture and traditions. Secondly, for the young, currently developing Jewish community, it is the way of building their identity by recalling their own historical roots. Gebirtig’s creativity is portrayed in this chapter in two inextricably connected aspects: (1) the historical background of musical culture at the turn of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries in Cracow; (2) the perspective of analysis of the musical layers of his pieces. The study emphasizes how the universal language of music is of a crucial importance for building a dialogue based on education, cultivation of memory, and restoration of identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Apart from the simple study of the songs of Mordechai Gebirtig, part of this musical education project designed to popularize this artist’s work among the young generation involves the development and use of parts of his musical heritage for didactic goals, such as the propaedeutic of conducting (students of second level music schools and students of musical education) and arranging chosen pieces for children or youth playing in their own music bands, at the level of music centers and first level music schools.

The songs *Unzer orem kind*, *Reyzele*, *Arbetloze Marsh*, *Kinder-Yorn*, *Zog mir*, *Levone*, and *Di gefalene*, given their simple melodic lines and easy rhythmic layouts, provide valuable musical material which can be arranged according to the needs of children’s bands playing in a low key, for example – for two Western concert flutes and a piano or a string quartet – three violins and a cello. These pieces’ ambitions fit into a flute’s scale or within the boundaries of a violin’s first position, while the rhythmic values do not exceed sixteens at a modest pace, pitch with only a few chromatic signs: g-minor, e-minor, c-minor; contain a simple melodic line with a small number of adornments (the preceding notes), while the *detaché*, *legato* and *staccato* methods of stringing allow them to even be performed by beginner musicians.

Some slightly more developed pieces (regarding musical forms), *Hulyet, hulyet*, *kinderlekh*, *Kivele*, *Kum Leybke tantsn*, *Draytekhterlekh*, *Khalutsim-libe*, *Mayn Yoyvl*, *Farvos veynstu Sheyndele*, *Ikh hob dikh lib*, or *Hershele*, make valuable musical material on account of their artistic values which can be used to create arrangements for children’s school orchestras, both mixed and string, using single wind instruments: flute, clarinet, trumpet, percussion and piano. The above mentioned compositions, considering their low-maintenance formal construction, allow the band to achieve the maximum rhythmical and intonational precision in a relatively short time. In less advanced bands such technical developments will ease the work on intonational, clear conducting of the melodic line, proper proportions between the leading and accompanying voice, and the widely understood culture of team play.

The subject of the *Propaedeutic of conducting* assumes the introduction of pupils or students into the basics of the conductor’s art at a level of competence in gesture and its interpretation. To achieve this goal, one can use pieces of simple melodic, metric and rhythmic structure in one-voice brushwork, accompanied by a piano. Mordechai Gebirtig’s pieces, both in the original and arrangements with accompanying instruments, make great training material. After discussing the conductor’s technical apparatus, their posture and hand position, there follows the introduction of anacrusis, so called *auftakt*, and the ending gesture, sound, or whole phrase based upon metrical schemes.
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